

THE GUARDIAN

Vol.3 No.6 • Serving Madera County Veterans • June. 2007

Phone: (559) 675-7766 • Email: dblessing@madera-county.com



Visit our Web Site at:
www.madera-county.com Go to “Select a Department” then scroll down to “Veterans”
At Veteran Resources find back copies

Another Memorial Day has come and gone and soon we will be saying the same for another **year!** This years Memorial Day had something special within the ceremony, a group of 5 year olds staring in a standout role by saying the Pledge of Allegiance and then singing the following four song, National Anthem, America the Beautiful, This Land and God Bless America with the band “Shades of Grey” accompanying, all done flawlessly. Unbelievable, and if you missed this years program, well all I can say is if you missed this years program you really missed something special.

The meaning of this day impacts the entire world. Contemporary world history has been shaped and molded by the tens of millions of American veterans who put their lives on hold to wear the uniform. Who among us could begin to contemplate the world today had courageous defenders of freedom not stood fast against the scourge of Nazi fascism or ruthless imperialism in the Pacific or the Communist drive for world domination during the Cold War?

Our latest generation of American veterans is engaged in a struggle no less crucial. Everyday, young men and women are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan after having served as sentinels in the Global War on Terror. Most come home to joyous reunions with loved ones and revel in the collective sigh of relief that marks a safe return. Others come home with the visible and invisible wounds that are the tragic hallmarks of armed conflict, while still others return in solemn, eternal repose beneath an American flag.

The Guardian is published monthly by Dennis Blessing, Service Officer of the Madera County Veterans Service Office. It is freely issued, via email, to all Madera Veterans and Service Organizations.

The primary purpose of this publication is to provide County Veterans with a timely news source; effectively informing veterans of VA up-dates and other pertinent information. Hopefully, it will also serve as an inter-group vehicle, announcing important activities and information offered by other local service organizations.

Your comments and suggestions are always welcomed.

Dennis Blessing, Publisher

Phone: (559) 675-7766 Email: dblessing@madera-county.com



Veterans Service Office

Madera Veterans Office
321 W. Yosemite Ave.
Madera Ca 93637
Suite 101

Hours

Mon., Through Fri. 8-5
Dennis Blessing, Service Officer
(559) 675-7766

Madera Transportation
(888) 826-2838 ext 6424
from Merced (**72 Hr. Notice**)
Oakhurst (559) 658-5399

Immediate Release

Contact: Elizabeth Perrine

602-644-8356

eperrine@triwest.com

TriWest Resource Center Provides Online Support to Guard and Reserve

PHOENIX (June 5, 2007) —TriWest Healthcare Alliance today announces the launch of an online Guard and Reserve Resource Center, designed specifically for members of the National Guard and Reserve.

Due to their often-times distant proximity to military bases, many Guard and Reservist and their families are not able to access the resources and support networks built into an active duty military community. For that reason, TriWest's [Guard and Reserve Resource Center](#) (found on triwest.com) was developed with a virtual library of information for West Region TRICARE beneficiaries serving in the National Guard and Reserve, their families and leadership.

"We understand the unique challenges faced by members of the Guard and Reserve and their families," said TriWest President and CEO David J. McIntyre, Jr. "Just trying to understand how TRICARE works or what to do throughout the stages of mobilization, deployment and reintegration can be challenging, especially if you don't know where to go for answers, or even what questions to ask. "

The portal offers the following resources for members of the Guard and Reserve and their families:

- Streaming video outlining TRICARE benefits for Guard and Reserve members
- Guard and Reserve-specific news and updates, including *TRICARE On Point*, a quarterly e-newsletter
- Post-deployment support and behavioral health resources for the entire family
- Links to more than 80 support agencies and programs

Resources for military leadership

"Our nation's citizen warriors have been required to play a crucial role in the nation's defense," McIntyre added. "Creating a convenient resource that's accessible whenever they need it is another way TriWest can support these brave men and women and their families."

TRICARE is the health care program for the military, administered by TriWest Healthcare Alliance throughout its 21-state West Region. For more information about the Guard and Reserve Resource Center or TRICARE benefits, please visit www.triwest.com.

About TriWest

TriWest Healthcare Alliance partners with the Department of Defense to do "Whatever It Takes" to support the health care needs of 2.9 million members of America's military family. A Phoenix-based corporation, TriWest provides access to cost-effective, high-quality health care in the 21-state TRI-CARE West Region. TriWest is a proud Corporate Team Member of America Supports You. Visit www.triwest.com for more information.

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Drug Alert for Type 2 Diabetes Patients

By CiCi Moore
TriWest Healthcare Alliance

TRICARE West Region beneficiaries with type 2 diabetes should be aware of an issue regarding the diabetes drug rosiglitazone (Avandia®).

The New England Journal of Medicine recently published an article, which suggested that Avandia increased the risk of heart death and heart attacks among patients with type 2 diabetes.

The findings are based on analysis of published data from clinical trials that compared the risk of heart attack and heart disease-related death in patients on Avandia with patients who took a placebo or other diabetes drugs. Forty-two clinical trials were analyzed, which involved nearly 28,000 patients. The results showed that more than 65 percent of the deaths among diabetic patients in the trials of the drug could be attributed to heart disease. Heart disease is a common complication of diabetes but the possibility that Avandia could increase this risk warrants an alert to patients.

In response to this article, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has published a safety alert to all health care providers and is currently conducting a review of all available data.

The American College of Cardiology, American Diabetes Association, and the American Heart Association have issued a joint statement for patients currently taking Avandia:

"Patients using this drug should talk to their health care provider to determine the most appropriate course of action. Patients should not stop taking any prescribed medications without first discussing the issues with their health care provider."

Beneficiaries living with type 2 diabetes, especially those at high risk for heart disease or heart attacks, should contact their physician to discuss this information and evaluate available treatment options.

TriWest Healthcare Alliance Receives 'Contractor of the Year' Award for Outstanding Anti-Fraud Performance

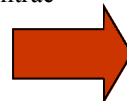
TRICARE Management Activity also honors TriWest with 'Case of the Year'

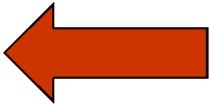
PHOENIX (May 30, 2007) — TriWest Healthcare Alliance today received the TRICARE Management Activity's "Contractor of the Year" award for outstanding and sustained anti-fraud performance.

This prestigious award recognizes TriWest's successful efforts in detecting and deterring fraud and abuse during 2005-2006.

TriWest also received the TRICARE award for submitting the "Case of the Year." Both of these awards are the highest recognition issued by the TRICARE Management Activity Program Integrity Office to any of the TRICARE contractors.

These awards were presented to representatives of TriWest's Program Integrity Department at the TRICARE Management Activity Healthcare Anti-Fraud Conference in Nashville, Tenn., attended by more than 400 TRICARE managers, contractors, federal law enforcement and criminal investigators, as well as state and federal prosecutors.





“We are delighted to be recognized for our efforts to protect and maintain the integrity of the TRICARE program and its beneficiaries,” said David J. McIntyre, Jr., President and CEO of TriWest. “These awards underscore the strides TriWest has made to help enable the Department of Defense to use taxpayer money toward providing quality military health care services to beneficiaries, not on supporting perpetrators of fraudulent activity.”

The “Case of the Year” award was for the widely publicized federal case against a Seattle psychologist who agreed to pay \$510,000 to the government and was sentenced to 12 months in prison. The individual pleaded guilty to filing bogus claims for reimbursement with TRICARE according to the Seattle Times, April 7, 2007 edition.

John Taylor, Director of Program Integrity at TriWest, will participate in several roundtable discussions during the three-day Nashville conference concerning the “Case of the Year,” how it developed and its successful resolution, as well as participating with other Program Integrity managers to discuss meritorious case development and referrals to TRICARE for investigation.

“We have taken a very aggressive proactive approach in uncovering fraud and abuse by increasing the quantity and quality of TriWest’s Program Integrity staff, utilizing ‘state-of-the-art’ anti-fraud software, and closer networking with TRICARE, as well as other investigative units and law enforcement agencies throughout the West Region,” said Taylor.



Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates tours the American cemetery during the 63rd Anniversary of D-Day in Normandy, France, June 6, 2007. Defense Dept. photo by Cherie A. Thurlby



This statue currently stands outside the Iraqi palace, now home to the 4th Infantry division.

It will eventually be shipped home and put in the memorial museum in Fort Hood, Texas.

The statue was created by an Iraqi artist named Kalat, who for years was forced by Saddam Hussein to make the many hundreds of bronze busts of Saddam that dotted Baghdad.

The statue was created by an Iraqi artist named Kalat, who for years was forced by Saddam Hussein to make the many hundreds of bronze busts of Saddam that dotted Baghdad.

Kalat was so grateful for the Americans liberation of his country;

he melted 3 of the heads of the fallen Saddam and made the statue as a memorial to the American soldiers and their fallen warriors.

Kalat worked on this memorial night and day for several months.

To the left of the kneeling soldier is a small Iraqi girl giving the soldier comfort as he mourns the loss of his comrade in arms.

Do you know why we don't hear about this in the news?

Because it is heart warming and praise worthy.

The media avoids it because it does not have the shock effect that a flashed breast or controversy of politics does.

Caring for our Veterans
By Mark Wyland, *Senator 38th District*
Chairman, Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs
250 Words

I am sure that many of you were disturbed, as I was, regarding the deaths that have occurred at the VA Medical Center in Los Angeles. It concerns me a great deal that the state is not moving quickly enough to address the needs of our veterans, especially their health.

Five years ago the California State Legislature authorized the building of 5 new veterans homes in order to accommodate the influx of returning soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan as well as those baby boomers who are starting to require higher rates of medical attention. Currently, the state has sent out to bid 3 of the 5 veterans homes, West Los Angeles, Lancaster and Ventura, of which West Los Angeles came in over the bidding price.

Veterans have waited far too long for the medical attention they desire. As the Chair on the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, I intend to look into the status of the 5 new homes and the progress the California Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of General Services have made in constructing these homes and making them available for our veterans that are in dire need of these medical services.

Bill Report:

SB 159 (Wyland) – Prompt Payment Act Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises: Set for Veterans Affairs Committee Hearing on April 10, 2007.

SB 829 (Wyland) – Cal-Vet Home Loan Act: Mobile Homes: Increases the loan limits for qualified veterans who wish to purchase mobile homes. Set for Veterans Affairs Committee Hearing on April 10, 2007.

Dear Editor,

On behalf of my fellow Congressional Medal of Honor recipients, we salute those who are writing history on menacing sand swept roads, along perilous mountain ridges and in towns and villages fraught with danger at every door:

As Americans quietly mark Military Appreciation Month this May by carrying out our daily routines, going to our jobs, shopping, making dinner reservations and keeping up with American Idol, it's you we can thank for the privilege of freely leading our lives.

We admire your determination to stop cold one of the most dangerous, brutal and immoral enemies that our country, and all nations, have ever faced – a new enemy determined to murder indiscriminately and intimidate viciously to halt progress and erase freedom.

We understand your will to battle on, even in the face of criticism, weakness and lack of vision of countrymen who will benefit from your sense of duty and sacrifices.

We know what you are trying to accomplish and how difficult it will be.

The dangerous, demanding work you do is your gift to our nation, bought and paid for by the personal, physical and emotional hardships you endure daily and by the lives of your fallen brethren.

Your gift is delivered by the sacrifices of the families standing steadfastly behind you and suffering, as they do, the anxiety of separation. That is their contribution to the future of mankind.

Take heart: You are the hope of the world.

Gary Littrell, Command Sergeant Major, U.S. Army (Retired)
President of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society



TEXAS



CALIFORNIA

GOVERNORS

May 1, 2007

Dear Members of the Texas and California Congressional Delegations:

We write to you today to encourage your support and co-sponsorship of HR 551, the Home Ownership for America's Veterans Act of 2007. It is our hope that our brave service men and women returning from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan will be eligible for this important program.

Our states are two of five, along with Alaska, Oregon and Wisconsin, which offer low interest rate home loans to veterans. These loans are funded through the sale of tax-exempt Qualified Veterans Mortgage Bonds (QVMBs). Currently, these loans are available to only a small percentage of veterans. In 1984, federal tax law was amended to limit the beneficiaries of the QVMB program to veterans entering the armed forces prior to January 1, 1977.

This unfortunate change effectively created two classes of veterans and devalued the service and personal sacrifices made by those entering the service after 1976. The QVMB program was further limited by requiring eligible veterans to apply for loans within 30 years of their discharge date. The number of eligible veterans is now rapidly decreasing, and if action is not taken quickly, our programs will no longer be able to assist those veterans who need it most.

In the 109th Congress, HR 4297, the Tax Increase Prevention and Reconciliation Act of 2005, removed the service entry restriction for only Alaska, Oregon and Wisconsin. HR 551 would rectify this inequity and make QVMB home loans available to most veterans in all five of the affected states, including those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, this bill is fiscally responsible and does not raise the bonding authority of our programs, only indexing current limits to inflation.

We strongly urge your support for HR 551 and ask for your help to ensure enactment this year. Those veterans serving in the Persian Gulf War, Somalia, Grenada, Panama, Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq should enjoy the same level of benefits that have been granted to the veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and please feel free to contact our offices to discuss this issue.

Sincerely,

Rick Perry

GOVERNOR RICK PERRY
STATE OF TEXAS
STATE CAPITOL
AUSTIN, TX 78701

Arnold Schwarzenegger

GOVERNOR ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER
STATE OF CALIFORNIA
STATE CAPITOL
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

May 14, 2007

The Honorable Chet Edwards
Chairman, Subcommittee on Military
Construction, Veterans Affairs
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Military Construction, Veterans Affairs
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Edwards and Rep. Wicker:

We write to request your continued support for the State Extended Care Facilities Grant Program in the Fiscal Year 2008 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act. This program provides funds to construct and maintain extended care facilities through a 65 percent to 35 percent federal-state match. While the president's budget proposal request of \$85 million is equal to the amount appropriated in the previous fiscal year, we would encourage any additional amounts to accelerate work on these projects.

California is currently working with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on grants to build five additional state veterans' homes in West Los Angeles, Lancaster, Ventura County, Fresno and Redding. The facilities will provide health care and homes to more than 1,000 veterans in our state and alleviate the extensive backlog of veterans waiting for placement. The State has secured the matching funding for its portion of these five new homes. The State has also met all deadlines for the projects and will begin construction on the West Los Angeles home this summer. Consistent and sufficient funding for the federal portion of this program will ensure these homes are built on time.

California operates three state veterans' homes serving approximately 1,700 veterans with various levels of care. The homes are located in Yountville in Napa County, Barstow in San Bernardino County and Chula Vista in San Diego County. Construction of the Barstow and Chula Vista homes was made possible through this federal grant program.






Last year the VA restructured the state extended care facilities grant program, dedicating 70 percent of the program funding for life safety projects to maintain existing homes and 30 percent for new home construction. While we agree the grant money should be available for both purposes, we believe the change underscores why a substantial increase to the program is needed.

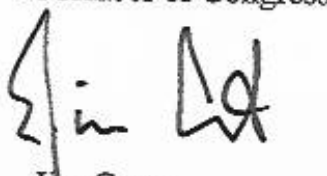
Along with California, several other states have applications for grant money for new homes including Florida, Texas, and North Carolina. While the VA has increased veterans' health benefits over the last several years, this grant program's funding has remained flat despite the growing demands being placed on both federal and state veterans' facilities. The VA system faces an increasing number of aging veterans from the Korean and Vietnam wars and new challenges for the care of younger veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterans of all ages and wars deserve the services they need.


Thank you for your consideration and support of this program. As Americans, we have all counted on veterans in the past, and we should never forget the contributions they have made to our country. Now, our veterans are counting on us.

Sincerely,


Henry A. Waxman
Member of Congress


George Radanovich
Member of Congress


Jim Costa
Member of Congress


Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
Member of Congress


Diane E. Watson
Member of Congress


Doris O. Matsui
Member of Congress


Mary Bono
Member of Congress


Dennis A. Cardoza
Member of Congress

Men and Depression

By Julie Bevirt

TriWest Healthcare Alliance

The National Institutes of Health estimates that at least 6 million men in the United States suffer from some form of depression every year. Research and clinical evidence reveal that while women and men can develop symptoms of depression, they often experience depression and cope with symptoms differently.

Men may be more willing to acknowledge fatigue, irritability, sleep disturbances and loss of interest in work or hobbies rather than acknowledge feelings of sadness, worthlessness or excessive guilt. Some researchers question whether the standard definition of depression and the associated diagnostic tests adequately capture the condition as it occurs in men.

Depression does not always show up as an inability to take action. Instead of acknowledging their feelings, asking for help, or seeking appropriate treatment, men may turn to alcohol or drugs; become frustrated or discouraged; get angry, irritable, violent or abusive.

Some may throw themselves compulsively into their work, attempting to hide their depression from themselves, family and friends, or even engage in reckless or risky behavior.

Sometimes depression can cause people to feel like putting themselves in harm's way, or killing themselves. Although the majority of people with depression do not die by suicide, having depression does increase suicide risk.

If you are thinking about suicide, get help immediately

Call your doctor's office

Call 911 for emergency services

Go to the emergency room of the nearest hospital

Ask a family member or friend to take you to the hospital or call your doctor

Call the toll free, 24-hour hotline of the National Suicide Prevention Life-line

800 273 TALK (1 800 273 8255) to be connected to a counselor near you

Call the TriWest Crisis Line at 1-866-284-3743

With early intervention, depression is very treatable. Individuals dealing with depression may find it helpful to talk to a trusted friend, family member or physician, or call TriWest for referral to a network mental health pro-

Men are more likely than women to report alcohol and drug abuse or dependence in their lifetime; however, there is debate among researchers as to whether substance use is a "symptom" of underlying depression in men, or a co-occurring condition that more commonly develops in men. Nevertheless, substance use can mask depression, making it harder to recognize it as a separate illness that needs treatment.

The first step in receiving the appropriate treatment for depression is obtaining a physical examination by a doctor. It is essential to be honest with your physician about the use of alcohol and prescription or recreational drugs. Certain medications, as well as some medical conditions can cause the same symptoms as depression.

Your doctor will rule out these possibilities through examinations, interviews and lab tests. If no such cause is found, you should obtain a depression evaluation either through your physician or a mental health professional referred by your doctor or TriWest.

Behavioral Health Resources

In addition to your doctor's services, TriWest offers a variety of behavioral health resources designed to assist and expedite support to you and your family. These resources are a part of TriWest's *Help From Home* initiative and include:

- An online Behavioral Health Portal featuring links to local and national resources as well as information on depression, stress, substance abuse, child and adolescent issues, and more (see www.triwest.com and select "Behavioral Health")
- *Help From Home* deployment support video series, available for West Region beneficiaries to watch online through TriWest's Behavioral Health Portal or to order as a 2-DVD set (free of charge)
- Personalized depression support and education from a clinical health coach through TriWest's Condition Management program
- Education for West Region providers about combat stress identification and treatment practices

A variety of resources for teens and children of deployed Service members

TRICARE beneficiaries are eligible for behavioral health benefits. To download a brochure on these benefits, visit www.triwest.com, select "Beneficiary Services" from the left navigation menu, click on "Handbooks, Brochures & Flyers" and select "TRICARE Behavioral Health Care Services" from the drop-down menu. If you would like a brochure mailed to you, please call 1-888-TRIWEST (874-9378).

With early intervention, depression is very treatable. Individuals dealing with depression may find it helpful to talk to a trusted friend, family member or physician, or call TriWest for referral to a network mental health professional.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

JOB OPENING

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS DEPUTY SECRETARY, VETERANS SERVICES DIVISION

Official Title:

Organizational: Placement

Reports to: Location: Exempt Level:

Exempt : Entitlement

Scope:

Deputy Secretary, Veterans Services Division 2nd Organizational Level, Executive Office

Undersecretary, Department of Veterans Affairs Sacramento, Headquarters D

Under administrative direction of the Secretary and Undersecretary, the Deputy Secretary, Veterans Services Division is responsible for the management of the Division's programs, which include veteran's claims and services, veteran's cemeteries, veteran's advocacy, and administration of state benefits for veterans and their dependents.

Primary Responsibilities:

Oversees and directs all aspects of the Veterans Service Division, including planning, staffing, training, budgeting, outreach and communication. Provides direction to the management team of the Division, both at Headquarters and at the Regional Offices, to insure that the Department's Mission, Vision and Goals are accomplished.

Exercises responsibility for the recommendation of policy and the implementation of policy insofar as it affects the Division and for insuring that all legislative and administrative requirements for the Division are met in a timely and accurate manner.

-Manages, organizes and directs the department to accomplish the following day-to-day functions:

Claims preparation.

Representation of veterans in due-process hearings before the USDVA.

Administration of local assistance appropriations and programs

Veterans License Plate Program.

Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise Outreach Program.

Homeless Veteran Advocate Program.

Disabled Veteran Dependent/Survivor College Fee Tuition Waiver Program.

State veterans cemeteries and veterans memorials programs.

General assistance and referrals for veterans and their dependents.

This position also serves as the primary coordinating link between the Department and USDVA benefits staff, County Veterans Service agencies, Veteran Service Providers and other military and veteran's organization whose charter and mission interface with the mission of the Veterans Service Division.

This position also meets with various State and Federal agencies, including legislative bodies, prepares reports as necessary, testifies before the legislature or other deliberative bodies and represents the Department at appropriate events, at the Cal Vet Board and at other Boards or Task Forces as requested.

THE GUARDIAN

SERVING MADERA COUNTY VETERANS



News You Can Use

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

VA Regional Office, Oakland

1-800-827-1000

VA Life Insurance Center

1-800-669-8477

VA Medical Center Toll Free (Fresno)

1-888-826-2838

Cal-Vet Home Loan Information, (Fresno)

559-440-5132

Patient Advocate (Fresno VA)**

Ext. 6970

Telephone Advice Nurse (Fresno VA)**

Ext. 6933

Outpatient Clinic – Merced/Atwater (Castle)

209-381-0105

Service Representative: (DAV, Fresno VA)**

Ext. 5642

Service Representative: (VFW, Fresno VA)**

Ext. 5647

Service Representative: (AMVETS, Fresno VA)**

Ext. 5816

Service Representative: (American Legion,
Fresno VA)**

Ext. 5648

**Fresno VA Pharmacy, (to order 14 days before
you run out call by touch tone phone)**

559-225-6100 Ext. 5333

CVSO Madera County (pager) D. Blessing

559-661-6895

Fresno Vet Center (Fresno)

559-487-5660

Transportation to VA Medical appointments

** Call VA Fresno toll free number first

1-888-826-2838 ext. 6424